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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [MASS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CS](#)  
SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: Merida Monthly Report January 2010

REF: 09 STATE 114752; SAN JOSE 130; 09 SAN JOSE 1156; SAN JOSE 19

1. (U) Per Ref A, Post submits the following report detailing Embassy San Jose's Merida activities for January 2010.

#### Issues for Washington

2. (U) Due to the amount of preparation and work that goes into producing the annual End-Use Monitoring (EUM) Report, due on February 1 (see Ref B; our EUM report), Post was unable to do any Merida procurements in the month of January. Although we conduct EUM all year long, January is our last chance to complete it and to prepare this lengthy report. We expect to continue with our Merida procurements in February.

3. (U) We are experiencing some delays ordering armored vests due to the requirement to answer bidders' questions on "FedBid." What happens is this: We submit the vests for bid and then bidders come back with oftentimes difficult to understand questions that Post has 10 days to answer; if we cannot answer the questions in a timely manner, then we have to re-open the bid. We have done this three times so far since early January. Following is an example of the kinds of "difficult to understand" questions that we receive:

#### FOLLOW UP FROM AN INTERESTED SELLER:

External Ballistic Vests....what ballistics do you want for the vests?...you state you want the plates in the vest and then add more plates later...do you want twice as many plates of the 2 types or just the vest cover and the L3 plates or some ballistic package AND the L3 plates OR some ballistics and NOT the plates AND substitute the L4 plates later listed as different specifications?

Just to confirm, you want plates that are rated "In Conjunction With"...(ICW) to make the soft ballistics level 3A to become level 4?...right....the ICW plates are IN ADDITION TO the 626 + 184 stand alone Level 4 plates????....again, for clarification purposes, level 4 stand alone plates are level 4 all by themselves and do not need any other ballistics...you want them AND the soft level 3 WITH the In Conjunction With plates???.... thus the vests WITH the plates will be level 4 PLUS level 4 plates....please confirm

¶4. (U) As a follow-up to our November/December Merida report (Ref C), we are currently in the Computer Assisted Job Evaluation (CAJE) step of the process of hiring an Eligible Family Member (EFM) to assist in staffing to better support Merida in Costa Rica.

#### Internal Developments

¶5. (SBU) Citizen security was the number one theme for Costa Rica's February 7 national elections, and President-elect Laura Chinchilla of the National Liberation Party (PLN) promised to make improving citizen security her top priority. Chinchilla told us during the campaign that she would seek U.S. assistance in her efforts to strengthen citizen security, particularly in improving the recruitment and training of uniformed police officers. Though the Government of Costa Rica almost doubled the public security budget over the past two years, Chinchilla has promised to add an additional \$100 million per year for police funding. Among other initiatives, she plans to establish a senior position focused on combating organized crime and narcotics, expand gang prevention program, and open a new police academy. Chinchilla comes into office with a strong background in citizen security issues; in addition to her experience as Vice Minister and Minister of Public Security, she has written a number of papers on police reform and justice administration. She has attended security seminars in the U.S., including a National Security Plan development seminar run by the Center for Hemispheric Studies in 2007.

¶6. (U) The Costa Rican Ministry of Public Security (MPS) released some initial statistics from 2009 that show that there was a slight dip in the number of homicides in 2009 compared to 2008. While the homicide rate has been going up about 20 percent per year during the Arias Administration, this reduction is nevertheless good news:

-The homicide rate per 100,000 in 2008 was 11, in 2009 it was 10.3.

-The total number of homicides in 2008 was 482, in 2009 it was 472.

#### Implementation Activities

¶7. (SBU) The following implementation activities took place in January 2009:

-On January 6, we had our first Merida quarterly review with all Costa Rican entities that are receiving or will receive assistance via the Merida Initiative. We provided a brief summary of Merida activities such as:

-Equipment already donated (one GPS to the Drug Control Police-PCD);

-Equipment ordered to date (three counternarcotics contraband detection kits valued at more than \$51,000; all of the equipment requested by the Costa Rican Air Wing valued at \$130,000);

-Equipment that we are about to order  
(armored vests valued at \$250,000; radios and radio workshop  
equipment valued at \$1.5 million USD;)

-Three assessment visits already completed  
(Information Technology assessment in August 2009; FBI fingerprint  
database assessment in September 2009; and prison assessment visit  
in October 2009);

-Status of FMF maritime interdiction  
support (we expect to receive two SAFE boats in summer 2010 and  
repair work will begin on Costa Rica's three 82-foot patrol boats  
in May 2010); and

-Finally, a brief on what we expect FY09  
Merida programs to be.

¶18. (U) The Costa Ricans appreciated the Merida update brief and  
provided the following feedback:

-Asked when they could expect to receive eTrace  
training (NOTE: currently scheduled for March 18-19. END NOTE);

-Recommended including Costa Rica on any Drug Abuse  
Resistance Education (DARE) funds that might come available via  
Merida (NOTE: In the FY10 project CARSII funds, there may be \$80,000  
for Costa Rica. END NOTE); and

-The Costa Rican Judicial Police (OIJ- equivalent to  
U.S. Federal agents) asked if we could purchase an "IBIS" type of  
ballistic analysis tool with our Merida police equipment fund.  
Although we do not have a quote for this particular item of  
equipment, a rough estimate is about \$1 million.

¶19. (SBU) On January 27-28, DEA and the Narcotics Affairs Officer  
(NAO) coordinated further training on use of the CT-30 drug  
detection kit in Liberia, Costa Rica near the border with  
Nicaragua. The Costa Ricans received specific training on hidden  
compartments and were taught how to look for contraband in those  
areas. This training is being immediately followed up by a road  
interdiction operation by the Costa Rican PCD in early February.

¶10. (U) We sent six Costa Rican law enforcement officials to the  
ILEA Law Enforcement Management Development Program from January  
18-February 26.

¶11. (U) We meet as a Law Enforcement Group, which also serves as  
our Merida Initiative meeting group, usually every Monday. In  
January we met on January 4 and January 25.

#### Significant Merida Supported Host Nation Seizures

¶12. (SBU) In January there were no significant host nation seizures

of drugs; however, there was a total of 327 kilos of cocaine seized, over \$250,000 of bulk cash seized, 729 dosages of crack cocaine seized, and 253 marijuana plants.

#### The Month Ahead

¶13. (SBU) Below are Post's activities for February:

-February 3: Recently arrived Ambassador Anne S. Andrew met with Minister of Public Security Janina Del Vecchio for their first formal meeting, which included a brief overview of Merida and other USG security assistance programs in Costa Rica.

-ILEA: Ten Costa Ricans are attending the Law Enforcement Safety and Training Survival course at ILEA from February 8-12, 2010.

-February 8-12: Four members from Post are participating in the Merida workshop in Guatemala.

-We continue to place police equipment orders for Costa Rican law enforcement agencies.

-From February 16-26, 2010, a two person team from U.S. Customs and Border Protection will be travelling to Costa Rica as part of the Merida Initiative to assess Costa Rica's land borders and provide the GOCR with 10 additional CT-30 drug detection kits, as well as related training. The CBP visit will support the Penas Blancas border, as well as border points on the porous southern border region with Panama in the Paso Canoas area.

Other significant security/law enforcement activities

¶14. (U) In this section we are adding additional information on other forms of USG citizen security assistance/law enforcement cooperation that are not necessarily linked to the Merida Initiative.

¶15. (SBU) On January 29, Emboffs met with Costa Rican Drug Institute (ICD) Director Mauricio Boraschi, who provided us an update on Costa Rica's national cellular telephone interdiction project. USG support for this program started in 2006, but little progress could be made until the GOCR reformed some laws and dedicated serious resources to develop a modern wiretap facility. In 2009, Costa Rica passed a strengthened organized crime law that provided more tools for prosecutors to use telephone interdiction and authorized the construction of a new wiretap facility. Boraschi's update on the wiretap facility included the following (powerpoint attachment is included with cable):

-Expect wiretap facility, located in OIJ's San Joaquin de Flores facility near San Jose, to be completely operational by June.

-Four judges will be dedicated full-time to listening to intercepted communications (in Costa Rica, only judges are

authorized to listen in).

- In January 2009, Huawei, a Chinese communications company, won a USD 235 million 3G cellular telephone contract in Costa Rica, which includes all the equipment necessary for telephone interdiction. (Septel will provide more information.)

¶16. (SBU) Embassy support to the GOCR's wiretap facility includes \$100,000 of INCLE funds as well as \$250,000 of DEA funds (that have been converted to INCLE). This \$350,000 will be used to finish the equipping of the wiretap facility with the following items:

-Electrical network;

-Air Conditioning system;

-Fire alarm and fire suppression system;

-Generator back-up for the facility;

-Security system for the facility, including cameras;

and

-Furniture and possibly standard desktop computers.

¶17. (U) In January, a total of seven Costa Ricans were sent to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) using IMET funds to attend the following courses:

-Two officers are attending the Counter Narco-Terrorism Information Analysis Course;

-Three officers are attending a Medical Assistance Course; and

-Two officers are attending the Counterdrug Operations Course (one of these officers will take a follow-on instructor-level training for this course).

¶18. (U) During our EUM (Ref B), we noted some success stories with previously donated equipment. Below is an excerpt from one of these success stories:

-With advanced audio/visual equipment donated since 2006, the OIJ has been able to record drug transactions in dark environments where they were not able to operate before. The unit reported that the donated equipment has contributed to enhancing the response capacity, improved the quality and definition of the evidence gathered for prosecuting drug and sex crimes as well as reduced costs.

¶19. (U) Post's Office of Defense Representative (ODR), via its Traditional Commanders Activities (TCA) program, took several senior-ranking Costa Rican uniformed police officers, including the Chief of Police Erick Lacayo, to New Mexico to discuss future events for our State Partnership Program (SPP).

¶20. (U) Beginning on February 22, ODR will be coordinating Special Forces training (JCET) for Costa Rican law enforcement special units at Murcielago, Guanacaste province. We expect 40 Costa Ricans to receive advanced tactical training during this event.  
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